

An Uncivil War

by Alex-Not Alice

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Summary: Sentari had never before opened its planet to offworlders. Now hosting a meeting of the UFP's ambassadors; not everyone agrees this is a good thing. Not when the planet's greatest resource is a secret capable of destroying not only the Federation, but the entire galaxy as well. The uprising plunges Chekov, Uhura, and Sulu into the midst of a civil war unlike any before it. AU

1. An Unpopular Decision

****FYI: Class F is a yellow-white star whose temperature ranges between 6,000 and 7,500 degrees Fahrenheit. A Class K is an orange star whose temp. ranges between 3,500 and 5,500 degrees. Our own sun's temperature ranges between these two at 5,200 and 6,000 degrees.****

****Planet temperatures mentioned vary more than is mentioned below depending, of course, where you are located. The cities of the Capitol and Tormikan Bay are approximately level with Kansas in the US; Spain and Italy in Europe; Afghanistan and Japan in Asia when you look on a map of the world. I don't include latitude and longitude because Sentari is slightly larger than earth, and the scale isn't quite the same. This is just a general idea of where the cities are in relation to the equator. 138 degrees F. is equal to 59 degrees Celsius. 98 degrees F. is equal to 38 degrees C. - in case you didn't want to look it up.****

****No Warnings . . .****

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><p>PROLOGUE

Aloni Ranah pushed her mount onward toward the palace through the crowded streets of the capitol. Trying to make headway at this time of day was an effort in futility. Glancing overhead, she could see

that Zur, the class F yellowish star of Sentari's twin sun system had already reached its zenith; Zol, the cooler class K orange star, would be following suit shortly.

It was Sentari's cool season; named after the smaller sun because Zol was closer for half of the year. The other half, life was only tolerable because of Sentari's elliptical orbit kept the planet a distance from Zur. Even so, the Zur season became very warm by most Federation civilizations' standards with the average temperature of 138 degrees. Today, however, was a chilly ninety-eight degrees. She suppressed a shiver and raised her internal body heat slightly to compensate.

She wished she had sent her daughter's message out in the morning, but she had been running late all day. Now it would have to wait until evening to be posted. Her long, dark brown hair was pulling free from where it was secured at the back of her neck. Her grey-green eyes noted the positions of the people around her so as to not cause injury to the unwary. In truth her caution was unfounded for most Sentarians. It was only the very little children who had yet to develop the awareness of their surroundings and a bit of self-discipline that the horse-bound traveler must keep watch for.

As she pulled out of the marketplace, Aloni was able to spur her horse into a brisk canter, and covered the rest of the distance quickly. She reigned him in and dismounted, leaving him to one of the palace's stable hands as she bounded up the marble steps, taking three at a time. One last glance at the noonday sky told her that it was nearly second zenith. She had only minutes to reach the council chamber.

Noa would be furious with her if she were late. Having no emergencies at the medicenter meant that she would also have no excuse. Aloni knew that the queen wouldn't mind, but her husband was a different matter altogether. He refused to consider her tardiness as being fashionably late. She rolled her eyes thinking of Noa's peeve. One would think the man would have been used to it after nearly twenty seasons of marriage.

Reaching the council chamber, Aloni pushed open the double doors and crossed the room with only seconds to spare. She flopped down in her chair, tossing her husband a delighted smile where he sat across from her. The scowl on his face indicated how close she had cut it, but soon his frown began to melt under her cheerful disposition. In all their seasons together, only Aloni could tease the man out of his grumpiness with only a look.

"Don't look so smug," Noa whispered brusquely. "You almost didn't make it."

"Ah, but I did now, didn't I? Don't sulk, dear; it's unbecoming a man of your position," Aloni winked at her husband mischievously.

Looking around the table, Aloni noticed that there were two others that hadn't made it on time. She leaned over the table conspiratorially.

"It would appear that we are missing a couple of people," she

said.

Noa answered without looking up from his notes.

"Frishka Tannot should never have made the council," he grumbled. There was no love lost between Noa and the councilwoman. "And Her Majesty is probably making sure you made it here before she did." He glanced up at her. "Did you call to tell her you were running behind?"

"No, I didn't," Aloni crinkled her nose at the man. "I know you and Frishka don't like one another, but could you at least attempt a little civility when she is in the room? She was appointed to the council the same as you were," she admonished.

"Not just like me either! I earned the right to be here; just as you did. She's a civilian, for the Almighty's sake." The word left an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

Aloni frowned at his language, and was rewarded at the slight flush that covered his cheeks. It was another achievement that only she could manage.

"I'm the head physician and you are the Commodore of the planet's military. Hardly the same thing, you realize. She had to be voted into the civilian's council before she could be appointed, unlike you and me. Our positions alone guarantee our place here," she reminded him.

Noa frowned at her. "Since when did you become her defender?"

Aloni ignored his question. "Civilians aren't so bad, you know. Without them, you wouldn't have a job . . . Or food, or clothing, or a home, or . . ."

"Alright already," Noa raised a hand as he interrupted her. "You've made your point. But does she have to be late every time?"

"She's not late every time," Aloni point out with a smirk. "Sometimes I am."

"Why are you taking up for her all of a sudden? You like her even less than I do," Noa countered. He eyed his wife suspiciously.

"Don't try to outflank me, Noa," Aloni returned his glare. "I am your wife; not your enemy. I'm just reminding you to be nice once in a while."

"Not in my job description," her husband snarked back at her.

"If you can't say something nice . . ."

She didn't have the chance to finish as the doors to the chamber opened with a loud noise as they banged into the walls catching everyone in the room's attention.

"Well," Noa drawled loudly; leaning back in his chair. "Speak of the devil."

Aloni shot him a look of warning. His eyebrows rose in mock innocence.

* * *

><p>Noa Ranah settled back into his chair, determined to ignore Tennot's disruption. He was not a happy man today and his countenance bespoke his disposition as loudly as if he had bellowed it. The other council members were doing their best to avoid attracting his attention. Only Aloni had the nerve to challenge him . . . Of course, she was the reason behind his mood in the first place, and it had nothing to do with her habit of tardiness.<p>

He had been forced to listen to his wife's opinion of their daughter's last communique the previous evening and he was less than pleased. It was bad enough that Kaura had insisted on leaving her homeworld and joining Starfleet, but now Aloni was convinced that the girl had foolishly gone and fallen in love . . . And not with just anyone, but with her commanding officer, no less; an offworlder!

Frankly, he couldn't see what Aloni had been talking about when he had watched it. He had noticed how impressed she seemed to be with her head of security, but he was certain that was merely a professional opinion and a sign of respect. While he could admire a man who believed enough in his ideals to make a career out of defending them, Noa wasn't ready to witness his only child forsaking a relationship with one of her own people in order to court romance with an offworlder. The very idea was impossible!

Unfortunately, even Queen Britannia had expressed interest in this offworlder that had apparently so captured the attention (and heart?) of her only goddaughter. He had sat through an uncomfortable evening of listening to the two women devising a plan of action in an effort to meet this young man. So, it was that Noa's evening and this whole day had been spoiled by the queen's decision to do the unheard of and grant the man visitation privileges if he agreed to accompany Kaura home on her next shore leave.

Now, he sat with the council, some of whom he didn't particularly like, waiting for meeting that would change Sentari forever. He wondered how much Kaura's communique had influenced the decisions that Britannia's was about to present the council. He had listened to an overview of the meeting's itinerary the previous evening. If the queen had her way, his job protecting this world would become that much more difficult.

He couldn't imagine the council would agree to this. He only prayed that the queen would be willing to listen to common sense. She had purposely ignored his advice last night, but certainly when the rest of the council members repeated his arguments, she would listen to reason. But, if by some disaster, the queen's plans for Sentari went through, Noa would likely need to call Kaura home. He would see to reinstating her to her previous position in Sentari's military. She was her father's daughter, after all, and he trusted her at his side than anyone else on the planet.

He watched as his wife exchanged a few pleasantries. Every day she grew more beautiful to his eyes. Her long, dark hair, currently upswept for convenience, remained untouched by gray, and her face

virtually unmarked by the seasons. She was his center when life became chaotic. She grounded him when his temper boiled. Simply knowing that she would always be there for him calmed his ragged nerves.

"This meeting will be called to order."

* * *

><p>"All bow in reverence to your queen," the chancellor's voice rang out.<p>

All thirteen members rose out of their chairs as one. Stepping away from the table, each dropped to one knee; their right fist against their chest above their hearts.

The woman that entered the chamber was stunningly beautiful. Her long, golden hair was swept up in an artful tangle of loose curls; soft tendrils framing her face and creating a halo effect when she stood in the sunlight. Her brilliant, emerald green eyes were windows to the wisdom and compassion with which she ruled her people. She carried herself with the grace and nobility of her birthright; commanding the attention of those around her more from the respect she had earned than from the title she bore.

Queen Britania of Sentari rolled her eyes at the formality. Everyone's heads were bowed, so no one would notice her lapse. She was eager to get this meeting started and was impatient for the delay.

As she walked the length of the table, she surveyed her council of advisors. Each of them differed in their opinions in nearly every item that was brought to the table; leading to some rousing arguments, but they all had, at one time or another, proven their wisdom and leadership in times of trouble and peace alike. Their loyalty to Sentari was unquestionable, and it went without saying that each would willingly sacrifice their very lives if called upon to do so. A few of them had even become friends.

Taking her place at the head of the table, Britania clapped her hands to permit her counselors to be seated. She winced a little in sympathy for Rohan Benoit, the eldest of her advisors; representing the science and technology division of the planet's southern hemisphere, as he struggled to his feet. The man was 48 seasons if he was a day. She was careful to keep her sympathy to herself. The old man's ego wouldn't stand for what he condemned as pity.

The planet's two hemispheres were separated by a large stretch of uninhabitable desert that encircled the world like a fat, white ring. Six advisors represented the southern hemisphere of Sentari, and six, the northern half. Each representing one faction of the people she ruled over. And then there was Noa Ranah, the Commodore of Sentari's vast military. His power was second only to hers. Not even her heir could gainsay the man; at least, not until he ruled in her stead.

A number of seasons away, she thought; amused. She was feeling on top of the world at the moment; anxious to usher in a new era for all of Sentari. But first she had to convince thirteen of the most stubborn, recalcitrant men and women on the planet.

She was glad that she had decided to approach Noa and Aloni Ranah first. For her plans to be successful, it would require their support, and she trusted no one as she did these two; her closest friends. Friendship, however, did not guarantee they would back her. Noa hadn't been convinced last night. Britannia knew without saying that the couple discussed the topic late into the night after leaving the palace. But who convinced whom as to what the right path would be?

"I called you here to discuss our association with the United Federation of Planets," she began.

She had their attention with that phrase. Every eye was on her. There were a number of the council that believed Sentari should renounce their membership and return to the planet's previous reclusive and solitary existence. She saw speculation and hope in their eyes. Too bad she was about to disappoint them.

"We have been members of the Federation for fifty seasons, and we have yet to open our world to them or venture to other planets in either commerce or tourism. It is time we reevaluate our position amongst our neighbors," she told them.

Benoit frowned in speculation. "Will we be dropping out of the Federation, your majesty?"

"I never said that, Rohan," but Britannia didn't bother to elaborate. She wanted opinions. "Will any of you speak your minds?"

Frishka Tannot, the most vocal of the group, stood. "What exactly are you suggesting, your highness? That we should consider granting offworlders open access to the planet?" It was plain in her voice that the woman disapproved.

"Perhaps not '_open_' access, but something along those lines, Councilwoman Tannot," Britannia told her. "Do you disagree?"

Noa scanned the faces of his fellow councilmembers; curious as to their reactions to this extreme measure. Tannot was inclined to be forceful in her views, and, if she were supportive of the queen's suggestion, then most of the others were likely to be as well. As much as he dislike her personally and they had their differences of opinion, he could only admire her tenacity. Tannot represented the northern hemisphere's commerce and industry's interests in affairs of state; she being the daughter and wife of a merchant herself. The oft time conflicting views between economics and the military always kept the two members at odds with each other. Tannot's people were predicted to benefit from this idea, but it was also a well-known fact that Tannot was a traditionalist.

Noa was interested in what came out of that woman's mouth for the first time since he met her. Surely the merchants of Sentari could only benefit from this easing of sanctions, but he knew Tannot would never completely approve of any plan that opened their world up to the rest of the Federation. The conflict, this time, would be with herself.

"I'll admit that doing so would expand our commerce considerably . . ." Frishka admitted reluctantly.

Always the businesswoman, Noa thought. She remained true to form.

"But how far are you proposing to allow this access? Surely your majesty isn't suggesting a retraction of our most sacred law, after all, it was ordained for the well-being of the galaxy."

When Britania made no comment, Frishka blanched. "If the law wasn't so vital, why would its violation hold the penalty of death? Could we live with ourselves should a war erupt?"

Rohan leaned forward. "War would most certainly be the result of such a foolish maneuver! You would condemn our children and grandchildren, indeed, all our future generations to a future of never ending battle!"

Britania sighed.

"At the time that the law was created, it was proven to be a wise decision. To introduce to the galaxy what was an immeasurable destructive power would have very well made our people the accomplices to the murders of innumerable planets. It would have plunged Sentari into an eternal war in order to protect this vital, natural resource and place on our heads a well-deserved burden of guilt.

"But I have recently reviewed the constitution of the United Federation of Planets and have found it worthy of a measure of our trust and certainly of our obligation as members to contribute to the continued growth and enhancement to the lives of its citizens. Our forefathers thought enough of the constitution to begin our alliance with the UFP some fifty seasons ago. During this time, we have benefitted from the wealth of the Federation's scientific and technological advances, and yet in return we have stubbornly refused to offer anything of ourselves or of our planet in return."

Britania searched the faces of her most trusted advisors; looking for some modicum of contrition. "We have become uncharitable and self-seeking. And yet we pat ourselves on the back for our altruism and vainly proclaim ourselves the keepers of humanity. And I, for the first time in my existence, am embarrassed of my world. I am ashamed of myself for allowing Sentari to become a leech at the neck of our allies."

* * *

><p>All of this, Noa was aware of. He couldn't say that he approved wholeheartedly, but he could see where their self-imposed isolation shamed their people. It had been part of Kaura's argument that had led to his and Britania's yielding to her request to join Starfleet. Well, that and the opportunity to critique Starfleet's military acumen and their training techniques.<p>

It had been interesting to hear her report. Starfleet relied heavily on its weapons and technology. Their hand to hand skills were less than impressive in comparison to Sentari's people. Kaura had been amused when she had been offered a position as a training instructor upon completing her time at Starfleet Academy. Tempting though it had been, she had instead requested a position in security on Starfleet's own flagship.

It wasn't surprising that she had been granted her request. Kaura had finished early and at the top of her class. She had even refused a promotion, preferring to go aboard as a mere ensign and working her way up by conventional means. On Sentari, Kaura's military rank was equal to that of a Starfleet captain. She was the youngest to have ever reached such a rank aside from her own father. That she would turn this down to enter Starfleet as a lowly ensign, annoyed him greatly. Had she remained on planet, she would have likely been awarded the 4th commander's position by the age of eighteen seasons.

* * *

><p>Britania yanked Noa's thoughts back to the present with her next announcement.<p>

"In six weeks' time, Sentari will be hosting the Galactic Diplomacy Meeting for the UFP in Tormikan Bay. Ambassadors will be traveling here from across Federation territory in order to renew their oaths to the Federation of Planet and work out difficulties and create treaties with their neighbors while under our largesse," Britania told them.

He sat forward in his chair. The queen had said nothing of this the night before. His eyes darted to his wife, but she, too, appeared startled by the announcement. Stunned silence answered her.

Noa cleared his throat. "Your grace, do you think this is wise?"

The look she bestowed on him would have had anyone else at the table on their knees, but Noa wasn't the Commodore for nothing.

"You will be opening up our world to the presence of hundreds of offworlders, many of whom hold onto their Federation citizenship by the skin of their teeth and a benevolence granted to them only by the distance spread between them and their neighbors," he stressed. It was difficult to contain his anger, and from the looks on Aloni and Britania's faces, he was failing spectacularly.

"This has been on my mind for couple of seasons," Britania replied. "Recent developments have simply made the opportunity too good to pass up."

Frowns around the table mirrored his own, but where their expressions were marred by confusion, Noa and Aloni's both understood all too well. Kaura's last few communiques had sparked the queen's curiosity. How long ago had she determined what Aloni and he had only just discovered? That Kaura was in love with an offworlder . . .

But this action seemed a bit extreme for the queen to arrange to meet her goddaughter's love interest! She must have indeed been planning this action for a long time. That Kaura had found herself a beau was, but a mere bonus.

Two chairs away, Pax, the northern representative of urban development, spoke up. "_This_ is why you had the new conference center built!"

The conference center was a modern marvel of architecture and

engineering. One of the largest buildings of its kind. Noa had toured it on numerous occasions with an eye for security. It was a jewel in the crown that was already Tormikan Bay, one of the most beautiful cities in the northern hemisphere.

It had its own nearby dormitories and apartments, created not for housing Sentarian representatives obviously, but for a flood of visiting offworlders. At least here, Noa could see that the queen had kept the city's inhabitants in mind. Better to keep all the offworlders contained in one area. Safer that way, and he had no doubt the visitors would be allowed out only in specially arranged tours of carefully chosen points of interest.

His mind swirled with infinite details that he would need to arrange before the ambassadors' arrival. It could be done, he thought. It wouldn't be easy, but it could be done.

"I hope to address the Federation representatives about the qualities of our natural resource and prepare the way for more of our people to live, work, and explore the galaxy beyond our own system," Britania added.

At this, a collective gasp went up.

Not resources . . . The queen had said 'resource', and Noa had no doubt that had been done purposely. There was only one resource on the planet that was linked directly to Sentari's most sacred law.

"No." It was but a whisper. Noa didn't dare speak aloud. But he wouldn't have to; everyone present was thinking the exact same thing.

Their people were highly disciplined. It began at infancy and never ceased throughout a person's seasons. It followed him into the grave itself. No one spoke of or demonstrated the use of the sunstones in the presence of an offworlder . . . Any offworlder! To do so promised death to both the Sentarian and offworlder alike . . . Swift and unforgiving death.

"You seek to recall the Law of Secrecy?" Frishka gasped.

"It is time," their queen decreed.

Aloni sent him a panicked look. His own face had closed down; hiding his emotions and his own reservations about the wisdom or foolishness of this plan. He was leaning heavily towards foolishness. He could not imagine a happy outcome once the news of this got out.

The people would not agree to this.

* * *

><p>REVIEWS WELCOME . . .

This is a new fandom for me, but this story has been simmering in my mind since before there was an official fan fiction site. I had begun this with the intentions of publishing it, but it began to go places that worked better here than in canon. Consider this an AU . . . Although, I stray only a tiny bit at this point.

**Could you figure out who the Starfleet officer is? If you are a fan at all of the original series and its subsequent movies, it should be glaringly obvious. :D **

2. A Sporting Chance

As I mention at the end of the prologue, this is slightly AU. It is taking place at some point in the final two years of the initial five year mission, but already Sulu and Uhura have been promoted to Lt. Commander, and Chekov has already left navigation behind to become the Enterprise's new chief of security as a Lieutenant.

Warning: Some Language . . .

* * *

><p>Blinded, Kirk threw an arm over his face. What had started as a roar was slowly becoming a distant rumble. Eventually, he grew aware of other noises in the background. As they morphed into words, Kirk began to make them out.<p>

"Captain! Are you alright?"

"Jim, can you hear me?"

"Somebody call sickbay!"

Kirk cleared his throat. "Don't call sickbay," he tried to say. What came out couldn't be described as coherent. He tried again. "Don't call sickbay."

The images in front of him cleared to reveal his first officer, his helmsman, and an ensign from engineering whose name he couldn't recall at the moment.

"That wouldn't be advisable," Spock told him.

"Right. So, am I dead?" He groaned.

"Hardly, Captain. Although I must admit to some relief to see you conscious so quickly." Spock moved back out of the way as Kirk struggled to sit up.

"How long have I been out," he asked as both hands shot up to prevent his head from falling off of his shoulders. He was relieved to discover that it was, in fact, still attached. What else he discovered, however, was a growing lump on the back of his throbbing cranium.

"Approximately fifty-seven seconds."

"Is that all?" Kirk looked past his first officer in an effort to gain his bearing and saw that he wasn't on some remote, hostile planet, but in the ship's gymnasium. "Hardly enough to warrant calling in Bones, Spock."

Leaning back against the bulkhead, he asked. "So, what did I miss?"

On Kirk's other side, Sulu sat back on his heels. "From what I observed, Mr. Spock's boot."

"I was endeavoring to demonstrate various Vulcan martial art techniques when you became distracted at a rather inopportune moment."

"I see," Kirk rubbed the sore spot delicately.

"In fact, Captain, you did not. That was the problem." Spock leaned around to better examine the lump.

Kirk hissed and swatted the Vulcan's hand away. "Cut it out, Spock. I'm fine! Ensign, cancel that message to sickbay." Annoyed, he watched the ensign verify his order with his first officer before leaving to carry it out. "So, what could have possibly distracted my attention from a rampaging Vulcan?"

No answer was forthcoming as Sulu cleared his throat and turned his head to hide a smile. Spock merely raised an eyebrow and stood up. As the Vulcan moved out of his line of sight, Kirk found himself staring at the alluring vision of one of the ship's newest members. He suddenly remembered reading the report that had informed him of addition of one Ensign Mmiora Rralgan; a Severite and the ship's new zenobiologist.

Severine was home to a people reportedly descended from cat-like creatures. The proof of this stood before his eyes. Mmiora Rralgan's cat-like ears protruded proudly from a dark mane that extended down her back. Her large, golden, almond shaped eyes stared back at him, unblinking; the slit pupils were currently wide with her concern. Being covered from head to toe by short, fine black fur, she looked astonishingly similar to earth's own black panther.

Twitching her delicate, pink nose in what Kirk took to be sympathy, she straightened; her full prehensile tail stretching forth to stroke his cheek.

"I'mmm glad you arre feelingg betterr, Captainn," she purred seductively.

Kirk swallowed hard and cleared his throat. "Ah, yes," he nodded. "Thank you, ensign . . . Rralgan, isn't it?"

Mmiora smiled; pleased that the captain recognized her and revealing a row of sharp teeth in the process. "Since you arre well, I must be rreturrningg to my duties."

She nodded politely and turned to leave; her movements the epitome of feline gracefulness. She had been assigned to the Enterprise only a week ago. Kirk hadn't had the opportunity to meet her until now. None of the stories that he had heard about her species were exaggerated, he decided.

"Well, that was awkward," he sighed, taking Spock's proffered hand and pulling himself to his feet.

He warded off the wave of dizziness remarkably well, all considering. Only Spock seemed to have noticed, but wisely kept his council.

Taking his towel from Sulu, he tossed it over his shoulder.

"If it's all the same to you, Spock, I think I will head back to my quarters. I will see you both on the bridge shortly," he told them. "I have a ship to run and I can't do that from the gym."

The loud clashing of metal startled him and Kirk spun about; seeking the source of the noise.

"That was better, Pavel, but I know you have more power there. Quit holding back." A mahogany-haired beauty chided.

She swung the sword in her hand with the expertise of a long experience. She stepped back into a ready stance; one hand extended in front of her and her sword arm above her head.

"Try it again," she coaxed.

Chekov? What was his Chief of Security doing sparring with a . . . Was that a _broadsword_?

He glanced over to see that Spock and Sulu had both joined the growing crowd of spectators watching the exhibition.

"Who is Chekov sparring?"

Sulu answered from beside him. "That is Ensign Ranah, sir. She's transferred to the Enterprise right out of Starfleet Academy around eight months ago. She's the first Sentarian to ever join Starfleet."

A Sentarian? On his ship? How the hell had he missed that? Kirk frowned, but his eyes were immediately drawn to the telltale wrist cuffs that all Sentarians were reputed to wear. The light flashed from the unique stone that graced the backs of each bracelet. He had heard of the stones, but never seen one. They almost glowed with a faint iridescent shimmer that resembled nothing so much as an opal . . . But these stones were_ no_ opals! No, these stones seemed to glow with some sort of unusual inner fire.

Once again, Kirk regretted that his time didn't often allow for him to meet each new crewmember; as had happened in the cases of both Ensigns Ranah and Rralgan. Kirk knew that Sentarians were a closed society despite their affiliation with the Federation. Visits to the planet were extremely rare, and instances in which the Sentarians themselves left their own star system could be counted on two fingers . . . Well, three fingers now, apparently.

Most of the tales circulating about the private race were unverifiable rumors and Kirk had always taken them with a grain of salt with no way of telling fact from fiction. He pursed his mouth in silent contemplation. It would be worth the effort to extend the hand of welcome to his latest . . . um, recent . . . he sighed; the addition to his crew, if only to learn a bit more about the reclusive culture.

Sulu appeared enraptured at the display. Kirk glanced down at the unused foil in his helmsman's grip. The sleek, slender fencing sword had little in common with the much heavier broadswords that his security chief and the ensign were brandishing at each other.

The woman wasn't especially tall; Uhura likely topped her height by three or four inches, but neither was she as bulky as he might have expected of one coming from a world with greater-than-earth gravity. No, she appeared slender and graceful, but there was nothing gentle about the way she waved her weapon!

Her shoulder length, mahogany hair was pulled back from her face and held in place by a braid. Her exercise wear consisted of white tights and a white blouse that hung to her upper thighs and belted in place with leather. The long sleeves were split and the ends tucked beneath the edge of her bracelets; four inch, white metal cuffs that extended from her wrists halfway up her forearm. Even her ankle boots were white.

He wondered if this was a Sentarian thing . . . all the white. He knew that the planet was rumored to be tropical, so that made a kind of sense. It offset the golden tan complexion of her skin; an unusual feature in the coldness of space.

"A few weeks ago I asked Pavel to let me teach him fencing . . ."
Sulu volunteered without taking his gaze away from the show.

"Again?" Kirk smiled. He was quite aware of Sulu's intention to teach Chekov the rudiments of fencing, but so far, the Russian lieutenant had shown no interest in picking up the other man's passion for the sport.

Sulu sent the captain an amused glance. "I know, I know, but someday I will wear him down and he will learn the sport."

"So, how did _this_ happen?"

"This happened around the same time. Pavel apparently took up Ensign Ranah's offer to learn Sentarian swordplay instead," Sulu shrugged.

"Jealous?" Kirk smirked.

"Of her technique? Yes," Sulu grinned. "Of the beating he's taking at the end of her sword? I can't say that I am. Watching this week after week, I've decided that I prefer a rapier to a broadsword."

Kirk laughed. "Not exactly the same, is it?"

"Not quite," Sulu agreed. "But it is just as beautiful in its own brutal way."

Kirk couldn't help but wonder if the lieutenant was speaking of the swordplay or of the woman wielding it.

* * *

><p>So far, both Kaura Ranah and Pavel Chekov were completely oblivious to their recently acquired audience. They had grown accustomed to the occasional stares they garnered when they brought out the swords. At first, Kaura had been annoyed by the onlookers. Beginners were easily distracted by the comings and goings of numerous people and the attention they received, and would become

discouraged when their failures were witnessed.<p>

She knew she was taking this too seriously. Most of the species that she had been exposed to recently considered swordplay more as a hobby or a sport than a method of battle in this modern age. Few could appreciate the skill required to become an expert swordsman as she was, but then, Kaura had been doing this since she was but two seasons old. Her father gifted her with a tiny modified sword as soon as she had conquered walking. Noa Ranah was perhaps the best swordsman that Sentari ever produced, so it was no wonder, with the man as her teacher, that Kaura had eventually grown capable of challenging him and even, occasionally, winning.

This was an intricate part of her heritage, and in it also lay honor. Often, Kaura was reminded of how far away from her home she was by the blatant disregard for honor so many exhibited in the places beyond her own star system. So, she felt lucky to have one such as Chief of Security, Lieutenant Chekov as her immediate commanding officer.

He had helped to ease the terrible pangs of homesickness by showing an interest in her culture and taking her up on her offer to learn Sentarian swordplay. Indeed, whenever they worked together, time permitting, she would regale him with stories from her youth and it was almost like revisiting all those places again. Pavel had taken all her talk of honor and blood oaths with all the seriousness that they deserved, and it was this, above all else, that had made her want to share her world with him in a more substantial way by teaching him the broadsword.

If Pavel Chekov were a Sentarian, she knew he would be making his way through the planet's military ranks with lightning speed. Kaura was slowly becoming aware that her respect and admiration for a fellow officer was evolving into fascination. If only he were Sentarian . . . If only he weren't her immediate superior!

* * *

><p>Pavel Chekov wiped the sweat off of his brow with the back of his hand. When he decided to take up the ensign's offer and learn the broadsword, he hadn't expected it to be quite the challenge it turned into. He had had a little experience with the broadsword before, and had seemed capable of holding his own . . . he thought. It had, at the time, seemed like a good excuse to get Sulu off of his back, at least, with his neverending efforts to teach Pavel to fence.<p>

Sulu had been trying to get him to take up fencing ever since they had met. Truthfully, Chekov was more than a little interested in learning to fence; it was just that he had no interest in learning it from Sulu. Although the helmsman was his closest friend, Chekov had no desire to endure the good-natured ribbings he was bound to receive in the process.

Instead, he had jumped at the chance to take lessons from someone as professional as Ensign Ranah. He wanted to believe that her beauty hadn't been a factor, but Chekov didn't like lying to anyone; not even himself. He was careful to not schedule their shifts together any more than he might anyone else, but he admitted that Kaura was as fascinating as she was competent, and wanted an excuse to spend time with her that wasn't on the clock.

He blocked another swing and marveled at her strength. He had felt the vibrations from that blow travel up his arms. Sentari was slightly larger than earth, and as such, its gravity was greater. Not so much that its people were stocky or bulky like those from other planets with greater than earth gravity. Kaura appeared earth-normal, but her muscle mass was more solid, denser perhaps than that of the average earth woman. She was as easily as strong as he was even as she appeared deceptively delicate to one's eye.

He wasn't sure if all the rumors about Sentarians' military acumen were true or not, but the reports he had on Ensign Ranah's grades put her at the top of all of her classes bar none. He had read glowing reports on her performance throughout Starfleet's rigorous survival training and knew that she had turned down a position to teach hand-to-hand combat upon graduation.

Chekov would never admit to his excitement upon learning that the Enterprise would have the first Sentarian as a part of her crew. He had heard things about their rigid code of honor and their planet's boast of military superiority. Many scoffed at it, but so far, Pavel was impressed. If Ensign Kaura Ranah was anything to go by, it would seem they had reason to boast. Especially now, he gasped. He could feel a fine tremor in his limbs already. How long had they been sparring?

I should have eaten before coming to the gym, he berated himself silently.

Kaura was circling him almost playfully as he trudged about, exhausted, determined to keep her in sight. _Bozhe_! She wasn't even breaking a sweat! How he wanted to wipe that damned sweet smile off of her pretty face.

He snarled.

She laughed.

He lunged, seeing an opening.

Kaura neatly sidestepped him, simultaneously knocking his sword aside with a quick defensive maneuver. Spinning about, he thought he might have the drop on her, but Kaura had already dropped down and swung a leg out; sweeping his out from under him.

Chekov hit the mat with a dull thud. He grunted when Kaura's sword "sliced" across his midsection. He closed his eyes with a sigh. He took the opportunity to catch his breath.

"You're dead . . . again," she quipped as she sat down on the floor beside him.

"It feels like it," he agreed without opening his eyes. Lying here felt a lot like he thought heaven should feel like. He hadn't realized exactly how comfortable the gym mats were before now.

"Would you like me to point out your mistakes," she offered helpfully.

Chekov answered by throwing an arm over his face. He wondered if he had time to grab a nap before he needed to get ready for his shift.

"Don't get discouraged! You're just trying too hard," she told him as she patted him on his shoulder. "You've improved a lot over the last few weeks."

He snorted. He might have laughed, but he hurt too much.

"If we keep up this pace, I wouldn't doubt you could one day replace me as my planet's champion in the broadsword event!" She tried to cheer him up.

Not that made him laugh. His hands immediately went to his abdomen and his legs drew up against the sudden pain. His laughter ended in a groan.

Her smile dropped off of her face and she leaned over him.

"Are you hurt," she asked, suddenly concerned.

"Only when I laugh," he assured her. "I had no idea I was so far out of shape."

"I wouldn't say that," she practically hummed.

His eyes snapped to hers and she blushed.

"I mean, it-it's obvious that you are in great shape," she stammered. "Really . . . great . . . Um, shape." Her voice dwindled off.

He lifted an eyebrow, just to watch the pink deepen, before letting her off the hook. "I'm sure I landed with great technique. It was only a little splat, after all," he joked.

Her smile came back. "You can only get better," she assured him.

"Because there is nowhere left to go when you're flat on your back except up," Sulu's voice cut in cheerfully.

* * *

><p>Kaura glanced up startled. She had been so focused on Pavel that she hadn't even noticed they had company. It took only second for her to recognize Lt.-Commander Sulu, Commander Spock, and Captain Kirk. She scrambled to her feet; hastily smoothing her tunic before shooting to attention.<p>

"Sirs, I beg your pardon," she blurted. "I didn't see you."

The captain smiled warmly and waved a hand at her. "At ease, Ensign," he said. "We're all off duty here."

Kaura hesitated; glancing down at her commanding officer for direction, but Chekov was still lounging on the floor where she had left him. She allowed some of the tension to ease from her and rolled her shoulders in an effort to relax.

"So, Mr. Chekov," Kirk laughed. "How's the lessons going? Would you care for some pointers?"

Whatever Pavel might have said was interrupted by Kaura as she quickly spoke up in defense of her student. "We only started a couple of weeks ago, Captain, and while the Lieutenant has shown considerable improvement, it is hardly enough time to become an expert. It took me nine seasons to qualify as an instructor." She frowned as she did the math in her head. "That would equal fifteen or so of your earth years."

Pavel climbed to feet. "It's alright, Ensign. The Captain and Sulu were only joking with us."

Kaura nodded, irritated at the blush that stung her cheeks. She never had this trouble at home. She didn't even have this trouble while in the Academy; always confident and in control. She had no idea where this sudden insecurity came from.

"Of course, Sir." she replied softly. "I beg your pardon, Captain."

"No need, Ensign," Kirk brushed off her apology. "I am interested in learning more about the Sentarian broadsword, however. May I?"

She handed over her sword to the captain, hilt first and watched as he tested its weight and balance with a few practice swings. She was familiar with earth's variety of broadswords and knew her world's brand was slightly slimmer and shorter than the average sword used throughout earth's history. The metal that made up a Sentarian sword was also unique to the worlds in her system and a few others that she knew of. It's molecular structure was denser than steel and made the weapon a little heavier and much stronger.

"Are you familiar with the broadsword, Captain?"

"Ah, that would be a no, Ensign," Kirk replied easily.

Spock cleared his throat. "Actually, Captain, that is not entirely true. If you remember, there was the incident on Beta XII-A involving the energy creature that fed on negative emotions . . ."

Chekov groaned. "_No_ . . . Don't mention that one, _please_!"

Spock raised his eyebrow at the lieutenant. "Swords were brandished in the encounter with the Klingons. In fact, you, Sulu, and the Captain along with a section of the crew all handled the weapons . . ."

"That may be, Mr. Spock," Chekov said as he finally climbed to his feet. "But '_handled_' is a relative term, in this case."

Spock tilted his head, but Kirk grinned. "Hacking might be a better term to describe what we did. There certainly was no grace involved. Nothing, at least, that could compare to the ensign's skill."

"I see," Spock murmured. "What about that time on Planet 892 IV, when you and the landing party were forced to use swords to escape capture after your communicators and phasers were confiscated by the indigenous people?"

"_That_ one I do not mind so much," Pavel nodded. He looked at Kaura. "I was not a member of the landing party during that mission. I missed out on all the fun."

Kirk shuddered and handed Kaura back her sword. "You are correct as usual, Spock, but I wouldn't have called myself an expert by any means."

"Nor would I, Captain," Spock agreed in a curious tone that made Kaura wonder if he were laughing at the captain's expense within his own mind.

Kirk ignored his first officer's ribbing. "Nor would I have called it particularly fun, Mr. Chekov. We held our own, but only just . . . Oh, to have had you among us during that mission, Ensign."

Sulu piped up. "**_I_** seem to remember a time . . ."

"Enough!" Kirk held up a hand.

Kaura smiled. "It sounds as though you've had plenty of experience with a broadsword, Captain. I'd be happy to spar with you sometime."

The captain laughed. "I highly doubt I would fair even as well as the lieutenant, here. But perhaps . . . another time."

"You only have to name the time," she agreed. "And I promise to be gentle," she teased.

"I have to tell you, sir, she knows her sport," Pavel warned, good-naturedly.

"From what little I've witnessed here today I have no doubt you are absolutely right." Kirk rubbed his hand over the back of his head; only to wince when his fingers brushed over the lump he had there.

Spock was examining the sword Chekov had been using. "If I may ask, Ensign, what is this edging on the blade? It appears to have properties similar to silicon. I've never seen silicon used in such a way before," he said. "Am I correct in assuming this is a safety feature."

"Yes, sir," Kaura nodded. "You would be right. It prevents serious accidental injuries due to slashes, cuts, and stabs. It can still create substantial bruising, but reduces the likelihood of fatal injuries significantly. It allows for more aggressive attacks during practice to better simulate actual combat scenarios."

"I think you've succeeded in accomplishing that," Pavel rubbed his stomach.

Kaura frowned at him. "Are you okay? I didn't actually hurt you, did I?"

"You need not worry," the lieutenant assured her.

"That last hit you took, when Ensign Ranah brought her sword down

across your abdomen, didn't leave a mark?" Sulu patted Chekov's stomach lightly; making the younger man flinch.

"Nothing to worry about," Chekov told them all.

"You flinched!" Kaura accused. Had she done him damage?

He glared at her, but she stared back at him, unintimidated.

"Then it wouldn't be a problem if you accompanied me to sickbay?" Kirk cut in.

"I said I was fine, sir," Chekov swore.

"Then you wouldn't mind if Dr. McCoy takes a look at you."

Chekov glared at the captain now. "I would mind! Very much so!"

Kirk threw an arm around his security chief's shoulders and led him towards the door. "If there is nothing to see; there shouldn't be a problem."

When Chekov would have continued to argue, Kirk interrupted him. "That's an order, mister."

"Yes sir," Pavel sighed. "I'll be down as soon as Dr. McCoy gives me my clean bill of health," he told Kaura. "We'll reschedule the meeting for this afternoon, instead."

Kaura picked up both swords. "Yes sir," she acknowledged; watching worriedly as Pavel followed Kirk to the exit; moving stiffly.

* * *

><p>Kirk glanced over at his security chief as they moved to the nearest turbolift with concern. Each step seemed to be torturous for the younger man. He slowed his steps a bit to accommodate Chekov's wounded gait, but not enough to make it obvious. He figured Chekov had enough bruises without adding yet another to his already battered ego.<p>

"So," he said casually. "How bad is it?"

"I'll make it," Chekov's voice came out breathless.

"Of that, I have no doubt, but that wasn't what I asked," Kirk clarified.

Chekov didn't bother to reply in the hallway. More people were up and moving about for what constituted the ship's day. The lift doors opened and three people began filing out; pausing briefly in order to salute Kirk and moved quickly out of the way. The two entered the lift and its doors closed; leaving the men in blessed privacy. Chekov sighed and slumped against the wall.

He tugged up the front of his shirt; revealing black and purple abs. Kirk hissed in sympathy.

"It only hurts when I laugh," he joked; repeating the phrase he had told the ensign earlier as he pulled the shirt back down. "And . . ."

he added ruefully, "when I cough; when I straighten; and when I breathe."

"You hid it well, but I think she was beginning to suspect something," Kirk noted.

Pavel grunted; wincing slightly. "All this just to avoid Sulu teaching me how to fence," he muttered, shaking his head. "I prefer to stick to sports that I excel at."

"That seems strange coming from you," Kirk commented.

"How so?" Pavel rolled his eyes to look at the taller man without having to move his head.

"It's just that I've served with you long enough to know that _anything_ you put your mind to, you will eventually excel at."

Chekov flushed; uncomfortable with such open praise from a superior. "Thank you, Captain, but eventually seems rather far off at the moment. She's extremely skilled at the broadsword."

"So, how did you get roped into this if you didn't want to learn the sword?" Kirk was curious to hear Chekov's answer.

"She told Sulu that I had already begun learning the broadsword and it would be confusing to teach two such dissimilar disciplines."

Kirk frowned. "So, you were already learning the broadsword when this came up?"

Chekov snorted; holding a hand on his stomach. "Of course not! I thought she had simply said such nonsense to get Sulu off of my back. It wasn't until later that I found out she had been serious." He shrugged. "She threatened to admit the truth to Sulu if I didn't take her up on her offer and at least give it a try. And here I am . . . On my way to sickbay."

Kirk fought the urge to smile for a minute, and then gave it up. The story was rather amusing . . . From his viewpoint, at least. "So, how is it?"

"She ****_says_**** I'm _improving_," Chekov muttered unenthusiastically.

Kirk leaned back against the other wall, smiling. "Why don't you quit?"

Chekov's head snapped up and he gaped at Kirk. "Quit?! _Never_, sir! Not while there is breath still left in my broken and battered body!"

Kirk hummed. "And does the view make up for the pain?"

What had been meant in jest apparently wasn't taken in said manner.

"Captain, are you suggesting that the only reason I'm continuing to

learn a potentially valuable skill is because I enjoy spending time with a beautiful woman?" Chekov stared. "Next you'll be declaring my pitiful performance was because I was too busy staring at her legs to pay attention to her instructions!"

It was Kirk's turn to be embarrassed. He moved to apologize for making assumptions. Clearly, Chekov was above such shallow behavior. The words stuck in his throat, however, when he noted Pavel grinning at him. The younger man gripped his middle as he chuckled painfully.

"It does sound pretty lame when you put it like that," Chekov admitted good-naturedly. "I'll admit that in the beginning spending time with a beautiful woman was the reason I took Ensign Ranah up on her offer, but now . . . Now I can honestly say that the view has taken a back seat to the need for a little payback. More than anything, Captain, I would love to best her. Just once!"

"Nevertheless, Lieutenant, I should apologize for making that assumption," Kirk said ruefully. "Sometimes I feel like I know all of you so well that I can second guess your motives."

Kirk recognized that his security chief was a very intense and driven young man and easily described as a workaholic, but he would have been worried if everything that Chekov did was purely motivated by his job performance. He was glad that Chekov felt comfortable enough to joke with him as it reminded Kirk that while his people were continuing to grow into excellent officers; they were fast becoming even better friends.

The turbolift slowed as it approached the proper deck, and Chekov sighed. "She does have nice legs, though, doesn't she?" He murmured this softly, as if to himself.

"Not bad," Kirk agreed quietly as the lift doors opened and they prepared to step out. "Not bad at all."

* * *

><p>REACTIONS?

Don't leave me hanging . . . _Review, Please!_

Only one of the two instances where swords are mentioned being used came from an actual Star Trek episode: "The Day of The Dove", in which Klingons and the crew of the Enterprise are trapped in a neverending cycle of violence by an insubstantial energy being that fed from violent actions and negative feelings like anger. The two enemies escaped by pretending an alliance and projecting happy, positive feelings toward the creature. A difficult job, indeed. (It's one of my favorite episodes.)

To JoytoAll: Why yes; yes, it does . . . start with a "P", that is. ~Alex

End
file.